EFFECTIVE USE OF TIME-OUT

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Note:

The following guidelines are presented to help teachers, educators and other practitioners implement time-out procedures appropriately and effectively. These guidelines are not a comprehensive or a complete explanation of how to use time-out in a given setting. Those who are attempting to implement time-out procedures for the first time should have supervision and consultation by professionals with expertise in behavioral intervention procedures, and who have knowledge of the research literature regarding time-out.

Time-out involves removing a student from all sources of positive reinforcement (events or situations that the student experiences as rewarding, such as attention from peers or the teacher, participation in an interesting activity), as a consequence of a specified undesired behavior. Time-out is only one option along a continuum of interventions supporting behavior change. Most teachers think that time-out involves placing the student in an isolated setting (a time-out area or room) for a period of time. Actually, time-out may be implemented on several alternative levels, ranging from the student taking time-out at his or her desk (contingent observation time-out) to removing the student to a separate area. Time-out is a relatively aversive and intrusive behavior reduction procedure, because it involves the removal of reinforcement and it interrupts the pupil's instructional program. However, its use may be required when the student's behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others. Behavior problems will not be positively affected by use of time-out unless it is used in the context of an appropriate program (e.g., teaching replacement behaviors, high rate of teacher reinforcement for appropriate student behavior, etc.). The age of the student is also a key factor in any decision to use time-out. Professionals must consider whether time-out is appropriate for children and youth at both ends of the age continuum (3 - 21). Other strategies or interventions may be more effective for these individuals in supporting appropriate behavior

Objectives

You should establish a set of procedures for using time-out in your classroom including:

1. A set of classroom rules that are clearly posted.

2. Procedures for teaching and practicing compliance with these rules until all students can state the rules and demonstrate what compliance with each rule looks like (e.g., respect others).

3. Strategies for systematically and frequently rewarding students for knowing and following the rules (e.g., praise).

4. A hierarchy of planned consequences for misbehavior that all students acknowledge and understand, with time-out as one of several alternatives for consequenting misbehavior.

5. A range of time-out locations that are suited to your classroom, your pupils, and your personal classroom management plan.

6. A set of personal guidelines for deciding when to use time-out and what level of time-out to employ.

7. Written procedures for applying time-out, including:

   • A warning signal, if appropriate.
   • What you say to pupils when giving them a time-out.
   • Decision rules regarding which level of time-out to impose, and when to go from one level to another.
   • Due process procedures for obtaining administrative and parental consent to use seclusion time-out, if applicable.
   • Specification of the duration of each time-out, how duration is monitored, and decision rules for varying the duration of time-out.
   • Specification of desired student behavior in time-out.
   • Procedures for releasing pupils from time-out.
   • A data sheet for recording instances of time-out.
   • Decision rules for evaluating the effectiveness of time-out with individual students.

• Alternative interventions when it is concluded that time-out is not effective in a given instance, or in general.

• Procedures for teaching students to take time-outs appropriately.

A professional with expertise in behavioral interventions should supervise your application of these procedures across three periodic classroom observations, using the Timeout Evaluation Checklist (see Appendix A)**.**

What factors are involved in using timeout?

1. A **warning signal** indicating that time-out is imminent if the pupil doesn't alter his/her behavior.

2. A brief **verbalized explanation** of why the student is being given a time-out if the student did not alter behavior after warning signal was given.

3. Provide **instruction** (see Appendix B) to the student in taking time-out.

4. The **location** in which time-out is taken
- **Contingent observation** - requires the student to remain in a position to observe the group without participating or receiving reinforcement for a specified period

- **Exclusionary** - denies access to reinforcement by removing a student from an ongoing activity

- **Seclusionary** - removes the student from the instructional setting as a means of denying access to reinforcement

5. The **duration** of time-out

- Brief (e.g., 1-5 minutes) timeouts are as effective as longer timeouts if the student hasn't been exposed to long timeouts first.

- Durations longer than 15 minutes should not be employed.

- A **nonverbal signal** indicating the beginning and end of time-out may be used if students have been taught to respond to it.

6. Requirements for **release from time-out**.

- Completion of the specified duration of time-out.

- Appropriate behavior during time-out.

- End of 15 minute maximum duration of time-out (implement alternate intervention if timeout has not been effective at this point).

How should timeout be implemented?

1. Identify the predictable antecedents and consequences of undesired behavior.

2. Conduct a **functional assessment** to identify the function of the target (undesired) behavior (see http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior2/main2.htm for guidance with regard to conducting a functional behavior assessment).

•   Behavior has two functions: to obtains something the student wants (e.g., teacher or peer attention), or to escape or avoid something he doesn't want (e.g., undesired task)

•   If time-out serves either of these functions, it will not have the desired effect on behavior (e.g., If the student is able to escape an undesired academic activity by going to timeout, behavior resulting in timeout will continue. Time-out also will not be effective if it provides an opportunity to engage in behavior that is self-reinforcing such as self-stimulation).

    Note: In addition to a time-out contingency, a plan should be in place to support desired replacement behaviors [see Appendix D for differential reinforcement examples and http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior3/main3.htm with regard to designing Behavior Intervention Plans).

3. Specify **in advance** the behaviors that will result in time-out.

4. Use less **intrusive behavior reduction procedures** first (i.e., differential reinforcement [see Appendix D], extinction, verbal aversives, response cost).

5. These less intrusive procedures should have been **documented as ineffective <u>before</u> time-out is used**.

6. Develop a **written statement** of how time-out is to be implemented.

7. If **seclusionary time-out** is used, the following requirements should be met:

    •   The time-out room should be at least 6' x 6' or larger and based upon the age and size of the student.

    •   The room should be properly lighted and ventilated.

    •   The room should be free of objects and fixtures with which the student could harm himself.

    •   A staff person should be able to see and hear the student in time-out **at all times**.

•   The area should **never be locked**.

- Use of a fully enclosed area limits staff observation and access to student.

- Confinement in a small area may lead to an escalation of student behavior.

- At no time shall a student be placed in a locked area alone.

8. Keep **written records** (see Appendix C) of each occasion when time-out is used including:

   - Student's name

   - Episode resulting in time-out

   - Time of entry into and release from time-out

   - The location of time-out (contingent observation, exclusion, or seculsionary)

   - The student's behavior in time-out

9. Always **differentially reinforce** desired student behavior in time-in environment (classroom or instructional setting). (See Appendix D)

10. **Evaluate procedures** (see Appendix A) if timeout duration exceeds 15 minutes.

11. Evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures if time-out is not having the desired impact on student behavior (collect and chart data on the frequency of the target behavior).

   Note: If time-out does not prove to be an acceptable or effective intervention the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) shall determine what interventions are to be used to address the behavior(s) of concern. A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) may be necessary, if not already undertaken, to improve upon or development of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
   (see http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior2/main2.htm for guidance with regard to conducting aFBA and
   http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior3/main3.htm for guidance with regard to the design of behavior intervention plans).

How may timeout be abused?

1. Time-out is overused due to lack of appropriate, proactive, instructional program.

2. The **time-in environment** (Classroom or instructional setting) is not sufficiently reinforcing (see Appendix D).

- Should give **four times** as much positive reinforcement as reductive consequences.

- Should have a systematic behavior intervention plan for teaching and reinforcing a replacement behavior that serves the same function as the undesired behavior.

3. Time-out is **applied inappropriately**.

   - Time-out is the only, or nearly the only, behavior reduction procedure used.

   - Time-out is applied too late---when the student is out of control.

   - Teacher escalates student behavior by attending to the student (e.g., lecturing) when the student is in time-out.

4. The **teacher does not enforce time-out contingencies**.

   - Student is able to avoid time-out by arguing or refusing to take time-out.

   - Teacher is unable to direct physically mature students to use time-out if they refuse (Consider age appropriateness).

   - Teacher is inconsistent in following through with time-out after warning (i.e., Using time-out after three (3) warnings

   - Solution is to teach students to take time-out: (see Appendix B).

     - Use systematic teaching procedures (e.g., Model, role play/practice and feedback).
     - Hold timeout training sessions at other occasions than when time-out is needed: reinforce successive approximations.
     - If the teacher is unable or unwilling to enforce time-out, he/she should consider alternate behavior reduction procedures.

5. The effectiveness of **time-out is not evaluated**

   - Use the Time-out Record (see Appendix C) to monitor the use and results of time-out. If time-out is used excessively (for example, 3 or more times a day for several consecutive days with a single student) the effectiveness of time-out needs to be evaluated and the individual behavior intervention plan for that student needs to be adjusted.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Gast, D. L., and Nelson, C. M. (1977). Legal and ethical considerations for the use of timeout in special education settings. Journal of Special Education, 11, 457-467.

Nelson, C. M., and Rutherford, R. B., Jr. (1983). Timeout revisited: Guidelines for its use in special education. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 3, 56-67.

Rutherford, R. B., Jr., and Nelson, C. M. (1982). Analysis of the response-contingent timeout literature with behaviorally disordered students in classroom settings. In R. B. Rutherford, Jr. (Ed.). Severe behavior disorders of children and youth (Vol. 5). Reston, Virginia: Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.

Twyman, J. S., Johnson, H. Buie, J. D., and Nelson, C. M. (1994). The use of a warning procedure to signal a more intrusive timeout contingency. Behavioral Disorders, 19, 243-253.